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A MONTH OF QUARANTINE.

BY E. L. GODKIN.

THE administration of the quarantine in the port of New York during the month of September last has excited the attention of the civilized world, and called forth from most observers outside the city, as well as in it, almost unmeasured condemnation. The medical journals of both Europe and America have treated it as in some manner barbarous and inhuman and inefficient. I might fill one number of *THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW* with short extracts from the savage criticisms passed on it by the non-professional journals of the civilized world. Somehow or other it has cast discredit on American government and society all over Europe. Moreover, as a matter of fact, it did not keep the cholera out of this city. Five genuine cases of Asiatic cholera occurred in September within the city, and the spread of the disease was prevented only by the energetic action of the Health Board.

The person on whom this great burden of censure fell was, of course, Dr. Jenkins, the Health Officer of the port, and I, therefore, in common I presume with most other readers of *THE REVIEW*, took up his article on "Quarantine at New York," in the November number, with great interest, expecting to find in it an answer to the charges of inefficiency and barbarity, either in the shape of simple denial or of valid excuse. This interest was increased by the fact that he has remained silent until now, under a torrent of indignation from the persons who have passed through his official hands, such as few public officers have ever been called on to encounter. To my great surprise, however, the article is a simple narrative, or, as he calls it, "abstract of what happened" during the cholera scare, without any allusion to the alleged defects in his management, which have called forth so many expres-

sions of disapproval. The "abstract," is an account of his action in the case of the "Normannia," which he says "was repeated with every steamship which arrived with cholera on board." I may, therefore, confine my examination of his story to the case of the "Normannia" alone.

The place in the public service Dr. Jenkins filled in the month of September was, for the time being at all events, probably the most important in the United States. It called for great and well-known talent as an administrator, and great and well-known experience as a sanitarian. I say "well known," because the Health Officer at a great port in times of pestilence, or any officer charged with the task of meeting any danger likely to cause a popular panic, needs to be a man in whose judgment the public places implicit confidence. His word as to the extent of the danger, and the value of the precautions to be taken against it, needs to be a word to which all will listen and on which all will rely. Now, anxious as I am to avoid even the appearance of personality of any kind in these remarks, I cannot omit mention of the fact that Dr. Jenkins fulfilled none of the above conditions.

The statute from which Dr. Jenkins derives his powers provides that on the arrival of an infected ship in Quarantine, the passengers shall be "immediately" removed, the sick put in hospital, and the well discharged without "unnecessary" delay, and the ship and her crew then thoroughly disinfected. This is what sanitary science now prescribes. The Advisory Medical Committee of the Chamber of Commerce further recommend that the passengers should be removed to a "safe and comfortable place of detention;" that their baggage should undergo most "careful investigation," and be subjected to "reliable processes of disinfection." They also say that the detention of the passengers on board the infected ship, according to the old method, "usually, if not invariably, involves the sacrifice of human lives, extreme and prolonged mental and physical suffering on the part of the passengers, and such an unnecessary detention of the infected ship, as is seriously detrimental to the pecuniary interests of her owner."

Now let us see, under the light of these indications, in what manner Dr. Jenkins dealt with the infected ships in the month of September. As he tells the story in his article everything was done that could or should be done, under the rules of modern

sanitary science, except the removal of the passengers from the ship. For failure to remove promptly I do not think he was to be blamed. He could not with the resources he had at command provide a "safe and comfortable place of detention" for 500 passengers of the "Normannia," even with the eight days' notice of her coming which he had. The city had provided no sanitarium and it could not be hurriedly improvised. Therefore, the quarantine which he had to propose for the "Normannia" was the old-fashioned mediaeval one, consisting in the detention of the well passengers on shipboard until all danger seemed to have passed. Let us take in detail his description of his methods :

"All sick, as well as all suspects, were transferred to hospitals on Swinburne Island." Not one of the sick or suspects was so transferred for thirty-six hours after the arrival of the ship.

"The dead were also landed." The dead lay in the steerage in some cases twenty-four hours.

"I notified the Hamburg-American Packet Company to send down water-boats, so that a supply of Croton water might be on board." No Croton water came on board for five days after the ship's arrival. The crew and stewards were during all that period drinking, and the passengers were washing, in the Elbe water taken on board at Cuxhaven. The Hamburg-American Packet Company sent down no water-boats, because the crews refused to go, and the authorities had not provided this indispensable instrument even of a proper old-fashioned quarantine. The ship arrived on Saturday morning, and fresh water only came on Wednesday night at 9 o'clock, just as the captain had determined to break bounds and go up to the wharf to get it.

"The company sent down a transfer boat, and all the immigrants, with their baggage, were landed on Hoffman Island." But not for thirty-six hours after the vessel's arrival.

"Dr. Sanborn, one of the most experienced assistants on my staff, and a man who knew exactly what to do, took up his residence on board the steamship. It was largely owing to his efforts, I think, that everything went as well as it did." Dr. Sanborn did not take up his residence on board until five days after the ship arrived, the captain having in the meantime been struggling to disinfect the ship with his own crew and a scanty supply of disinfectants sent him by the company.

"The dead were removed at night, to save the feelings of the

living, and were cremated." Some of the dead were removed with very little regard to decency in broad daylight, in my presence, and it was solely owing to the exertions of a few of the passengers in clearing the side of the ship on which the transfer boat lay, that the process was not witnessed by the whole of the cabin passengers.

"The baggage of the saloon passengers was washed down with the bichloride solution." The baggage which the passengers had in their staterooms, and which was much more likely to be infected than that which was in the hold, and was enormous in quantity, was subjected to no process of disinfection or examination. The passengers took it away with them just as it was.

Dr. Jenkins makes no mention of the transfer of the passengers to Fire Island, but that was marked by two serious offences, one sanitary and the other administrative. The first consisted in crowding the second-cabin passengers, among whom a case of cholera was supposed to have occurred, in with the first-cabin passengers, among whom no such case had occurred, on a small excursion boat, the "Cepheus." The other was hurrying them out in the open ocean, late in the afternoon, without a pilot, and against the advice of the captain, and without saloon or deck-lights, and without a doctor or medicines, to reach a difficult inlet on a very dangerous coast. This attempt ended in failure. The second was like unto it, and consisted in sending the same boat with the same passengers on the following day, without proper information as to the possibility of landing them at Fire Island, although threats of armed resistance had been rife for several days. Dr. Jenkins passes these incidents over without a word. I append here, in support of the above statements of mine, the following extracts from the report sent to Governor Flower by a committee of doctors on board the ship, headed by Dr. Lange, well known as one of the foremost surgeons in this city, and made on the fourth day of the "Normannia's" quarantine, Tuesday, September 6 :

"(1). At no time have there been facilities to remove the sick immediately after the onset of the choleraic symptoms; even dead bodies have been kept on board for twenty-four hours and more.

"(2). At no time an official thorough inspection of the ship has been made, nor have any measures been taken with regard to disinfection except such as were possible with the insufficient supply of disinfecting material carried on board.

"(3). Disinfecting material has not been furnished promptly, in spite of the request of the ship's authorities. Their demand made on Saturday, 3d, to place on board the ship an official expert to supervise and execute thorough disinfection has not been complied with.

"(4). The water supply of the ship has not been taken care of in the proper way; although by Monday morning the tanks were clean and ready to receive fresh water, such is not on board at the present hour.

The second-cabin passengers were, as a result of this too hasty action, on board this little boat for fifty-six hours, or from noon on Sunday till 6 p. m. on the following Tuesday, without regular meals or beds. The first-cabin passengers were on board the same boat under similar conditions for thirty-six hours, 600 persons in all, with no place in which to lie down but the floor. Had cholera broken out among them during this period, and especially cholera of the swift Asiatic type, against which Dr. Jenkins was guarding, the patients would have had to meet his or her fate on the bare deck, surrounded by a crowd and without nurse, medicines, or vessels. The only cholera remedy on board was a small quantity which one of the passengers, Dr. Sillo, of New York, had hastily thrust into his pocket at the last moment on board the "Normannia," when he heard to his amazement that the passengers were being transferred to the "Stonington," without a surgeon or medicines.

The case of the "Bohemia" was, if possible, a still worse illustration of these methods than the "Normannia," but Dr. Jenkins makes no mention of her in his article. She arrived, to use his own language, "infected from stem to stern," having 664 steerage passengers, and a record of 52 cases of cholera and eleven deaths during the voyage. She was detained in quarantine with all her passengers on board for fourteen days. After the fourth day no fresh cases occurred; but seven days later, the passengers still remaining huddled together, the disease broke out again, five fresh cases occurring, with two deaths, eight hours after the attack. Who was responsible for these deaths?

The mental condition of a large body of people likely to be detained on shipboard in danger of infection for an indefinite period ought, to be one of a Health Officer's first cares. His first visit to the ship should be devoted to the business of cheering them up, particularly when, as in the case under discussion, he has to deal with a large number of women, of invalids, of elderly persons, of persons whose money is running low, whose

homes are distant from the port, all of whom are likely to be profoundly depressed by finding their journey suddenly arrested under these appalling circumstances. He should at once call them together, explain the situation, make its brighter side as prominent as possible, tell them of the provision he is making for their health and comfort, and of the conditions on which their liberation depended, and provide prompt and regular means of communication with their friends on shore.

In the case of the "Normannia" nothing of the kind was done or attempted by Dr. Jenkins. His visits to the ship were very brief, and passed in short private chats with the captain, and his one public address to a very considerable number of the passengers was a threat made on the second day of quarantine to keep the whole body in confinement for full twenty days if any of them wrote to the newspapers, or rather to a particular newspaper with which he seemed to have a quarrel of some kind. The mail and telegraphic communication with the shore for the first three days could hardly be said to exist, and in its absence people availed themselves of such surreptitious facilities as were offered by the newspaper reporters and the crews of the quarantine boats. Later it became more frequent, but was to the last very slow and irregular. A letter took, on an average, two days to reach the city, which kept friends on shore, who supposed that cholera might kill in five hours, in a state of agonizing suspense. In fact Dr. Jenkins' attitude towards the passengers' correspondence was that of the warden of a penitentiary towards the letters of the convicts. He persistently refused to deliver a letter addressed by Mr. Grainger, a leading citizen of Louisville, Ky., to the care of a person in the office of a New York newspaper, and compelled him to change the address before consenting to take charge of it.

The leading medical paper of New England, *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, has declared this September quarantine of New York a "national disgrace about which the less said the better." From this view every thoughtful citizen will dissent. A "national disgrace" is something which should be incessantly talked about as long as its recurrence is possible. No good man should hold his peace about a public abuse, as long as it exists and a remedy is within reach. The New York quarantine is in no better condition to-day than it was on the 31st of August last. The danger which brought to light its defects in

such a hideous way in the following month has not disappeared. The best opinion of the sanitarians is that cholera is likely to recur in the spring in Europe, if not here, and should it find us still unprepared "national disgrace" will be a mild term, especially in the year of the Columbian Fair, to apply to our condition. If Congress and the President do not this winter put the whole business of protection from foreign infection into the hands of the Federal authorities, they will be guilty of almost criminal negligence. This done there would be a uniform system in every port, and at this port, the great gateway of the country, the quarantine service would be managed by the trained masters of organization who make our army and navy a subject of national pride, aided by the advice of our leading sanitarians who, as the London *Lancet* says, are in this field "men of the highest eminence."

E. L. GODKIN.